

community, our cities, and our towns all across America, as dedicated hard-working citizens find themselves receiving pink slips, they are laid off. And the big problem is that they are unable to find jobs.

This economic crisis is at its worst. In the district that I represent in rural eastern North Carolina, an area that once thrived on agriculture and textiles, both of which have been hard hit, it appears that as far as the textile industry, there is little or no hope for recovery. More than half a million jobs have been lost nationwide in the last 5 months alone. At this moment there are fewer jobs in the labor market than at any other time since the current recession began.

Since January of 2001, the Nation has lost 2.7 million private sector jobs, and the unemployment rate has risen from 4.5 in 2001 to 6 percent 2 years later. In North Carolina we have lost 130,000 jobs since the Bush administration took office; 80,000 of these jobs have been lost in the manufacturing sector; 5,328 textiles/apparel jobs have been lost in the first district alone since 1999; 32,640 textile/apparel jobs have been lost in North Carolina since 1999; 12,669 manufacturing jobs lost in the first district since 2001.

In addition to plant closings all across the State, they are leaving thousands of families in financial peril. In the Halifax County town of Roanoke Rapids, in my district, the closure of the West Point Stevens textile plant, and many of you may remember the plant immortalized as the foundation for workers' rights in the movie "Norma Rae," will put 350 families out of work next month. There will not be one yard of textile production in Halifax County once this West Point Stevens facility closes, abandoning a city on the Roanoke River founded on textiles.

Unless some long-term remedies are found, North Carolinians and, most specifically, workers in northeastern North Carolina, will face a crisis of chronic unemployment with shrinking safety nets to combat this crisis.

The percentage of workers nearly receiving regular unemployment benefits who subsequently exhausted those benefits without finding work was at its highest level ever just a few months ago in February.

The tax plan forced through this House last week included no provision whatsoever for extending unemployment insurance benefits, which are due to expire in just 17 days.

We have got to do something about this problem. It is time that we pass the bill that extended this deadline and provided jobs for our people. I urge us to take this step.

UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS ARE GREATLY NEEDED

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. MILLER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. MILLER of North Carolina. Mr. Speaker, 4 months ago as a brand-new Member of this House, I stood with two of my Democratic colleagues from North Carolina at the Employment Security Commission office in Raleigh. And together we called on Congress to extend unemployment benefits for an additional 26 weeks. At that time there were more than 37,000 workers who had already exhausted their unemployment benefits in North Carolina and nationally a million workers were without benefits, out of a job, out of money and because of the inaction of this House, out of luck.

Despite my plea and the plea of other Democrats to extend the benefits through a compromise plan that the Senate passed unanimously, the House leadership allowed the benefits to expire and allowed 1 million Americans and their families to go without benefits. And there was never an explanation for why this House could not trouble itself to act quickly, to act in time to give that extension. A few days later this House did act and extended benefits. It was not 26 weeks. It was 13. Again, no explanation for why we could not act in time.

Here we are again. With a deadline quickly approaching, the Republican leadership is again doing nothing to extend those benefits.

On May 31, just a couple of weeks, this House will let unemployment benefits expire again; but this time the impact will be far greater. Now there are 2.1 million workers who will be left without unemployment benefits. Twice as many in January, twice as many mothers and fathers, twice as many breadwinners, twice as many out-of-luck Americans.

The economy has lost more than half a million additional jobs since January. Since the recession began 2 years ago, the economy has lost 2.7 million jobs in the private sector. The persistence of job loss at this 2-year mark in this recession is the worst since the Great Depression. The unemployment rate is now 6 percent, and there are 8.8 million unemployed Americans. But again House Republicans are doing nothing to protect out-of-work Americans and their families.

The Republican leadership has found the time to do plenty for America's richest. The Republicans rammed the President's tax bill through last week. If you listen to the Republicans speak in favor of that bill, you would have thought you flipped from C-SPAN to the History Channel. You would have thought you had gone back in time and you were seeing House debates during the Great Depression or the Works Progress Administration or the Civilian Conservation Corps, because every Republican spoke entirely of creation of jobs. Only in passing and only occasionally were Republicans speaking for the bill mentioned that what the bill did was eliminate dividends, the taxation on individuals of dividend, dividend income.

As the gentleman pointed out just a short while ago, we have heard strained arguments before for how tax cuts solve a wide variety of problems. The Republicans say that tax cuts to the rich are the solution for everything from urban sprawl to tooth decay. Last week it was the creation of jobs and economic stimulus. But the proposed economic stimulus bill, or the bill described last week as an economic stimulus bill, does little, precious little, to stimulate the economy.

They said that we need to cut taxes on the richest Americans so that we can create what economists call the wealth effect; that the richest Americans need to feel so secure in their financial circumstances that they then will not feel inclined to save the money, but they will spend it; and that will stimulate the economy.

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The unemployed may not feel rich, may not feel wealthy from getting an extension of their unemployment benefits, but believe me, they will spend it. I call it the got-to-pay-the-bills effect. They will spend the money. They will spend it on their rent. They will spend it on food. They will spend it on health care costs. They will spend the money. Do not worry.

I do not favor, Mr. Speaker, an indefinite extension of unemployment benefits, but I do not believe, as apparently the majority in this Chamber do believe, that the majority of those who would be helped by the extension of unemployment benefits would prefer not to be working. If my colleagues think the unemployed are not looking for jobs because unemployment benefits allows them a tax-paid holiday, I invite my colleagues to come with me to Rockingham County. I would like to introduce them to unemployed textile workers who do not know when they will again find a job. They do not where to look for a job. I would like to see my colleagues say to their face that we need to light a fire under them so they will look for a job, and then, unless we end their unemployment benefits, they will not look, they will not go and find a job to support themselves and for their families.

I am proud to be here with many of my colleagues today, the first-term members on the Democratic side, calling for an extension of those benefits.

ECONOMIC CHALLENGES FACING OUR NATION'S WORKING FAMILIES

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. CHOCOLA). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Mr. CARDOZA) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. CARDOZA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to discuss the economic challenges facing our Nation's working families. The latest unemployment figures make it official: We are now in the longest period of job losses in America since the Great Depression. America